

# Child Welfare Outcomes 2003–2006: Report to Congress Executive Summary



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*Child Welfare Outcomes 2003–2006* includes:

- ❖ Data pages for each State that contain:
  - Contextual data
  - Performance on original outcome measures
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  - A State comment (if provided)
- ❖ A discussion of data issues and key findings of the data analyses across States

*Child Welfare Outcomes 2003–2006: Report to Congress* is a report created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (the Department) to meet requirements of section 203(a) of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA).<sup>1</sup> ASFA amended section 479A of the Social Security Act to require an annual report on State performance. *Child Welfare Outcomes 1998* was the first report created in the Child Welfare Outcomes series of reports. The present report, *Child Welfare Outcomes 2003–2006*, is the eighth report since the series' inception.<sup>2</sup>

The Child Welfare Outcomes Reports provide information on the performance of States in seven outcome categories.<sup>3</sup> The Department identified these outcomes prior to the first Child Welfare Outcomes Report in close consultation with State and local child welfare agency administrators, child advocacy organizations, child welfare researchers, State legislators, and other experts in the child welfare field. The outcomes used in this report reflect widely accepted performance objectives for child welfare practice.

In addition to reporting on State performance in these outcome categories, the Child Welfare Outcomes Report also includes data on contextual factors and findings of analyses conducted across States. Data for all measures in this report come from the Department's two national child welfare-related data systems—the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

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CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

The Child Welfare Outcomes Report presents data on child welfare-related contextual factors relevant to understanding and interpreting State performance on the outcome measures. Below is a summary of the FY 2006 data for these contextual factors.

Characteristics of child victims

- In 2006, 885,245 children were confirmed to be victims of maltreatment, and the median child victim rate across all States was 10.6 child victims per 1,000 children.<sup>4</sup> State child victim rates varied dramatically, ranging from 1.5 child victims per 1,000 children to 33.5 child victims per 1,000 children.<sup>5</sup>
- The percentage of child victims of a particular race/ethnicity varied among States. In 2006, there were many States in which the percentage of minority race/ethnicity child victims was disproportionate to the percentage of these children in the State population.<sup>6</sup> Disproportionate representation was found for Black child victims (31 States), Hispanic child victims of any race (7 States), and American Indian/Alaska Native child victims (16 States).

Number and characteristics of children in foster care<sup>7</sup>

- Nationally, approximately 512,000 children were in foster care on the last day of FY 2006. During that year, an estimated 303,000 children entered foster care, and 287,000 children exited foster care. The foster care entry rate ranged from 1.6 children per 1,000 to 9.7 children per 1,000 in a State's population.<sup>8</sup>
- The percentage of children of a particular race/ethnicity entering foster care varied among States. In 2006, there were many States in which the percentage of minority race/ethnicity children entering foster care was disproportionate to the percentage of these children in the State population.<sup>9</sup> Disproportionate representation was found for Black children (40 States), Hispanic children of any race (8

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States), and American Indian/Alaska Native children (20 States) entering foster care.

STATE PERFORMANCE ON OUTCOME MEASURES

The Child Welfare Outcomes Report presents data and analyses on seven outcome categories. A synopsis of findings for these outcome areas is provided below. The measures relevant to these outcomes are described in detail in appendix B of the full report. Outcome measures are also listed in tables I and II of this Executive Summary. When referencing changes in performance across time, original outcome measures are assessed from 2003 to 2006. However, composite measures are assessed from 2004 to 2006 because 2003 data are not available for these measures.

Outcome 1: Reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect

- In 2006, State performance varied considerably with regard to the percentage of child victims experiencing a recurrence of child maltreatment within a 6-month period (measure 1.1) (range = 1.6 to 13.7 percent).
- States with higher victim rates tended to have higher maltreatment recurrence rates within a 6-month period (Pearson's  $r = .67$ ). In addition, consistent with prior research, child maltreatment recurrence was more likely to involve neglect (Pearson's  $r = .37$ ) than either physical abuse (Pearson's  $r = -.29$ ) or sexual abuse (Pearson's  $r = -.29$ ).<sup>10</sup>
- Overall, 61 percent of States demonstrated improved performance between 2003 and 2006 with regard to the measure of recurrence of child maltreatment (measure 1.1). In addition, the median across States for this measure changed from 7.3 percent in 2003 to 6.0 percent in 2006, demonstrating an overall improvement in performance (a 17.8 percent change in the median State).<sup>11</sup>

## Outcome 2: Reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care

- In 2006, State performance regarding the maltreatment of children while in foster care ranged from 0 to 1.45 percent, with a median of 0.40 percent.
- Across States, there was a slight improvement with regard to performance on maltreatment of children in foster care (measure 2.1) between 2003 and 2006. There were a few more States that showed improved performance (21 States) compared to the number that showed a decline in performance (19 States). This is consistent with the fact that the median for this measure also improved from 0.45 percent in 2003 to 0.39 percent in 2006 (a 13.3 percent change).

In many States, a considerable percentage of children emancipated from foster care were in care for long periods of time before they were emancipated.

emancipated (measures 3.4 and C3.3). In about one-half of the States, 28 percent or more of the children emancipated from foster care were age 12 or younger when they entered foster care (measure 3.4), and 46 percent or more of the children emancipated from foster care, or who turned age 18 while in care, were in care for 3 years or longer (measure C3.3).

## Outcome 4: Reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry

- The 2006 data suggest that, in many States, a majority of children discharged to reunification were reunified in a timely manner. Across States, the median length of stay of reunified children was 7.1 months (measure C1.2), and the median percentage of reunifications occurring in less than 12 months was about 69 percent (measure 4.1 and C1.1).

## Outcome 3: Increase permanency for children in foster care

- In 2006, States were fairly successful in achieving a permanent home for all children exiting foster care (measure 3.1, median = 87.2 percent). However, States were less successful in achieving permanent homes for children exiting foster care who had a diagnosed disability (measure 3.2, median = 76.8 percent) and even less successful in finding permanent homes for children exiting foster care who entered care when they were older than age 12 (measure 3.3, median = 71.1 percent).
- In 2006, all States struggled to some degree with finding permanent homes for children who had been in foster care for a long period of time (measure C3.1). Measure C3.1 follows a cohort of children (those who have been in foster care for 24 months or longer as of the first of the year) from the first day of the fiscal year to the last. Only 26.2 percent (median) of these children had permanent homes by the end of the year. However, it is encouraging to note that 57 percent of the States exhibited improved performance on this measure between 2004 and 2006.
- In many States, a considerable percentage of children emancipated from foster care in 2006 were in foster care for long periods of time before they were

- Overall, 54 percent of States showed a decline in performance between 2004 and 2006 with regard to the median length of stay in foster care for reunified children (measure C1.2). Consistent with this finding, the national median for this measure also showed a decline in performance from 6.5 months in 2004 to 7.1 months in 2006 (a 9.2 percent change).
- Reentry into foster care is an area needing improvement for many States, as indicated by performance on measure C1.4 (median = 13.3 percent). Measure C1.4 assesses the permanency of reunification by conducting a 12-month follow-up of a cohort of children who were discharged from foster care to reunification and identifying the percentage of those children who reentered foster care within 12 months of their prior discharge.
- There was a moderate gain in performance across States between 2004 and 2006 with regard to the number of children who reenter foster care in less than 12 months from discharge (measure C1.4). Forty-six percent of States showed improved performance for this measure. In addition, the national median for measure C1.4 improved from 15.6 percent in 2004 to 13.3 percent in 2006 (a -14.7 percent change).

- Many States with a relatively high percentage of children entering foster care who were age 13 or older at the time of entry also had a relatively high percentage of children reentering foster care (measure C1.4) (Pearson's  $r = .56$ ). Conversely, many States with a relatively high percentage of children entering foster care at age 12 or younger also had a relatively low percentage of children reentering foster care (Pearson's  $r = -.55$ ).

From 2003 to 2006, 64 percent of States demonstrated improved performance with regard to the percentage of adoptions occurring in less than 24 months.

**Outcome 5: Reduce time in foster care to adoption**

- Achieving timely adoptions is a challenge for all but a few States. The percentage of adoptions that occur in less than 12 months from the child's entry into foster care is quite low in almost all States (measure 5.1, median = 3.1 percent).
- The percentage of adoptions occurring in less than 24 months from a child's entry into foster care is fairly low (measure C2.1, median = 29.9 percent). In addition, across States, the median length of stay in foster care for children adopted is 30.8 months (measure C2.2). In about 25 percent of the States, the median length of stay of children adopted is approximately 3 years or longer.
- From 2003 to 2006, 64 percent of States demonstrated improved performance with regard to the percentage of adoptions occurring in less than 24 months (measure 5.1b). The national median for this measure also improved from 23.9 percent in 2003 to 29.8 percent in 2006 (a 24.7 percent change).
- Many States (55 percent) also showed improved performance with regard to the percentage of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year who became legally free for adoption in the first 6 months of the year (measure C2.4). The national median for this measure increased from 9.0 percent in 2004 to 9.6 percent in 2006 (a 6.7 percent change).

There was a substantial improvement between 2003 and 2006 toward fewer placements of young children in group homes or institutions.

- Fifty-one percent of States showed improved performance in the percentage of children who were legally free for adoption who were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free (measure C2.5). In addition, the national median improved from 45.8 percent in 2004 to 50.5 percent in 2006 (a 10.3 percent change).
- Many States with a relatively high percentage of children adopted in less than 24 months (measure C2.1) also had a relatively high percentage of children reunified in less than 12 months (measure C1.1) (Pearson's  $r = .39$ ). This suggests that some States are more successful than others in achieving timely permanency for children in foster care, regardless of whether it is through reunification or adoption.

**Outcome 6: Increase placement stability**

- While most States appear to be reasonably successful in achieving placement stability for children in foster care for less than 12 months, States tend to be far less successful in keeping the number of placement settings low for children in foster care for longer periods of time. The median across States declines from 83.5 percent for children in foster care for less than 12 months to only 59.7 percent for children in foster care for 12 to 24 months, and then declines even further to 32.1 percent for children in foster care for 24 months or longer.
- States with a relatively long median length of stay prior to adoption (measure C2.2) also tended to have good placement setting stability, as indicated by the relatively high percentage of children in care for 24 months or longer who had no more than two placement settings (measure 6.1c) (Pearson's  $r = .47$ ).

**Outcome 7: Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions**

- In about one-half of the States, 6 percent or less of children entering foster care under the age of



12 were placed in a group home or institution. However, in 15 States, between 10 and 22 percent of young children were placed in group homes or institutions.

- There was a substantial improvement between 2003 and 2006 (a –26.6 percent change) toward fewer placements of young children in group homes and institutions. In addition, 75 percent of States showed improved performance on this measure between 2003 and 2006.

## CONCLUSION

The findings in this report suggest that there are both strengths and areas in need of improvement with regard to achieving positive outcomes for children who come into contact with State child welfare systems. Data presented throughout the Child Welfare Outcomes Report provide further insight into where individual States are experiencing the greatest improvements and challenges.

<sup>1</sup> See appendix A in full report for the specifications of section 479A of the Social Security Act as amended by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.

<sup>2</sup> There was no separate 2004 report. The Department was in the process of developing the new Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) measures during 2005 and 2006. Because it was considered important to include the new measures in all current and future Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, a decision was made to delay publication of the 2004 data until the new measures were finalized and could be included in the report. Consequently, the 2004 data were not included until *Child Welfare Outcomes 2002–2005*.

<sup>3</sup> In this report, the designation of “State” includes the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Therefore, the report provides information on a total of 52 States.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this report, a victim of child maltreatment is defined as a child having a maltreatment disposition of substantiated, indicated, or “alternative response victim” (*Child Maltreatment 2006*). The methodology for calculating the total number of child maltreatment victims differs between the Child Welfare Outcomes Report and *Child Maltreatment 2006*. In *Child Maltreatment 2006*, a victimization rate is computed by dividing the total number of victims (885,245) by the child population for the 51 States that reported this data to NCANDS (73,393,682) and multiplying by 1,000. A national estimate of 905,000 child victims was then calculated by multiplying the victimization rate by the national population for all 52 States (74,754,213), dividing by 1,000, and rounding to the nearest 1,000. The Child Welfare Outcomes Report uses the sum of the total number of child maltreatment victims (885,245).

<sup>5</sup> A State’s rate of child victims is defined as the number of child victims reported to NCANDS per 1,000 children in the State’s population. Children with more than one report of substantiated or indicated maltreatment may be counted more than once.

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this report, we are defining representation as disproportionate when a racial/ethnic group of victims constitutes at least one and one-half times the number of children of that racial/ethnic group in a State. The analysis of disproportionate representation was conducted for Black, White, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic children (of any race). Other races were not included in the analysis because of their very small representation in the population of the majority of States. Puerto Rico was excluded from this analysis due to unavailable data.

<sup>7</sup> Data used in this report pertaining to the number of children in foster care may be different from other sources, such as data found on the Children’s Bureau website, due to a number of variables, including the timing of data collection.

<sup>8</sup> Rate of entry is calculated by dividing the total number of children entering foster care in a State by the total child population in that State and multiplying by 1,000 [(N entering FC/child population)×1,000].

<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this report, representation is considered disproportionate when a racial/ethnic group of children entering foster care constitutes at least one and one-half times the number of children of that racial/ethnic group in a State. The analysis of disproportionate representation was conducted for Black, White, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic children (of any race). Other races were not included in the analysis because of their very small representation in the population of the majority of States. Puerto Rico was excluded from this analysis due to unavailable data.

<sup>10</sup> The strength of relationships in the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports are assessed using correlation coefficients, specifically Pearson’s *r*, which can range in value from –1 to +1. See the following for examples of prior research on maltreatment recurrence: (1) Drake, B., Jonson-Reid, M., Way, I., & Chung, S. (2003). Substantiation and recidivism. *Child Maltreatment*, 8(4), 248–260; (2) Lipien, L., & Forthofer, M. S. (2004). An event history analysis of recurrent child maltreatment reports in Florida. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 28(9), 947–966; and (3) Fluke, J. D., Shusterman, G. R., Hollinshead, D., & Yuan, Y-Y. T. (2005). Rereporting and recurrence of child maltreatment: Findings from NCANDS. Retrieved 2004 from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/05/child-maltreat-rereporting/index.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Percent change is calculated by subtracting “old” data from “new” data, dividing by old data, and multiplying by 100. For example, if maltreatment recurrence were 9.2 in 2003 and 7.6 in 2006, the percent change would be [(7.6–9.2)/9.2]×100 = –17.4 percent change.

Table I. Median State Performance, 2003–2006: Original Outcome Measures

Outcome Measures <sup>1</sup>	Median Performance by Year			
	2003	2004	2005	2006
Measure 1.1: Of all children who were victims of substantiated or indicated child abuse and/or neglect during the first 6 months of the year, what percentage had another substantiated or indicated report within a 6-month period? (N=44)*	7.3%	6.5 %	6.6%	6.0%
Measure 2.1: Of all children who were in foster care during the year, what percentage were the subject of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff member? (N=40)*	0.45	0.39	0.42	0.39
Measure 3.1: Of all children who exited foster care during the year, what percentage left to either reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=52)	86.1	87.1	87.3	87.2
Measure 3.2: Of all children who exited foster care during the year and were identified as having a diagnosed disability, what percentage left to either reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=50)	79.0	78.7	78.3	76.7
Measure 3.3: Of all children who exited foster care during the year and were older than age 12 at the time of their most recent entry into care, what percentage left either to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=52)	71.1	71.8	72.1	71.1
Measure 3.4: Of all children exiting foster care in the year to emancipation, what percentage were age 12 or younger at the time of entry into care? (N=52)*	29.1	28.5	28.3	28.6
Measure 4.1: Of all children reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care during the year, what percentage were reunified in less than 12 months from the time of entry into foster care? (N=52)	71.2	70.6	70.8	69.2
Measure 5.1b: Of all children discharged from care during the year to a finalized adoption, what percentage were discharged in less than 24 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (N=50)	23.9	25.5	28.5	29.8
Measure 6.1a: Of all children served in foster care during the year who were in care for less than 12 months, what percentage had no more than two placement settings? (N=52)	84.0	83.5	84.4	83.5
Measure 6.1b: Of all children served in foster care during the year who were in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months, what percentage had no more than two placement settings? (N=52)	59.0	58.5	59.4	59.7
Measure 6.1c: Of all children served in foster care during the year who were in foster care for at least 24 months, what percentage had no more than two placement settings? (N=52)	33.5	32.1	32.0	32.1
Measure 7.1: Of all children who entered foster care during the year and were age 12 or younger at the time of their most recent placement, what percentage were placed in a group home or institution? (N=48)*	7.9	7.1	7.1	5.8

\*For these measures, a lower number indicates better performance.

<sup>1</sup> Data for this table include all States for which adequate data are available.

**Table II. Median State Performance, 2003-2006: Composite Measures**

Composite Measures <sup>1</sup>	Median Performance by Year <sup>2</sup>		
	2004	2005	2006
Measure C1.1: Of all children discharged from foster care to reunification during the year who had been in care for 8 days or longer, what percentage were reunified in less than 12 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (Includes trial home visit adjustment) (N=50)	70.3	70.6	69.3
Measure C1.2: Of all children discharged from foster care to reunification during the year who had been in care for 8 days or longer, what was the median length of stay (in months) from the date of the latest removal from home until the date of discharge to reunification? (Includes trial home visit adjustment) (N=50)*	6.5 mos.	6.8 mos.	7.1 mos.
Measure C1.3: Of all children who entered foster care for the first time in the 6-month period just prior to the year shown, and who remained in care for 8 days or longer, what percentage were discharged from foster care to reunification in less than 12 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (Includes trial home visit adjustment) (N=50)	38.3	38.7	40.8
Measure C1.4: Of all children discharged from foster care to reunification in the 12-month period prior to the year shown, what percentage reentered care in less than 12 months from the date of discharge? (N=50)*	15.6	15.3	13.3
Measure C2.1: Of all children discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption during the year, what percentage were discharged in less than 24 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (N=49) <sup>3</sup>	26.8	29.2	29.9
Measure C2.2: Of all children discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption during the year, what was the median length of stay in care (in months) from the date of latest removal from home to the date of discharge to adoption? (N=49)*	31.7 mos.	31.6 mos.	30.8 mos.
Measure C2.3: Of all children in foster care on the first day of the year who were in care for 17 continuous months or longer, what percentage were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption by the last day of the year? (N=49) <sup>4</sup>	19.8	20.3	20.0
Measure C2.4: Of all children in foster care on the first day of the year who were in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer, and who were not legally free for adoption prior to that day, what percentage became legally free for adoption during the first 6 months of the year? (N=49) <sup>5</sup>	9.0	9.2	9.6
Measure C2.5: Of all children who became legally free for adoption in the 12-month period prior to the year shown, what percentage were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption in less than 12 months from the date of becoming legally free? (N=49)	45.8	48.3	50.5
Measure C3.1: Of all children in foster care for 24 months or longer on the first day of the year, what percentage were discharged to a permanent home prior to their 18th birthday and by the end of the year? (N=49)	24.4	26.2	26.2
Measure C3.2: Of all children who were discharged from foster care during the year, and who were legally free for adoption at the time of discharge, what percentage were discharged to a permanent home prior to their 18th birthday? (N=49) <sup>6</sup>	96.6	95.2	94.7
Measure C3.3: Of all children who, during the year shown, either (1) were discharged from foster care prior to age 18 with a discharge reason of emancipation, or (2) reached their 18th birthday while in foster care, what percentage were in foster care for 3 years or longer? (N=49)*	47.8	48.3	47.7

\* For these measures, a lower number indicates better performance.

<sup>1</sup> Data for this table include all States for which adequate data are available. Numbers are expressed as percentages except when measured by months, as noted. Individual measures developed for Composite 4: Placement stability are not shown in this table because the measures are nearly identical to the original measures of placement stability incorporated into measure 6.1 (see table I).

<sup>2</sup> All composite measures used in this report were developed for the second round of the CFSRs; therefore, data for those measures are presented for 2004, 2005, and 2006 only.

<sup>3</sup> Although measure C2.1 is calculated exactly the same way as original measure 5.1b, the results can vary slightly because the source files are different for the composite measures. In the source files for measure C2.1, all children are excluded who were not age 17 for at least 1 day. No such exclusion exists for measure 5.1b. In addition, composites are calculated at the county level and are then aggregated to the State level, which could also slightly influence performance on C2.1 compared to 5.1b. In this instance, there is the added possible impact of using only 49 States for C2.1; 50 States were used for 5.1b.

<sup>4</sup> The denominator for this measure excludes children who, by the last day of the year, were discharged from foster care with a discharge reason of reunification with parents or primary caretakers, living with relatives, or guardianship.

<sup>5</sup> A child is considered to be "legally free" for adoption if there is a date for parental rights termination reported to AFCARS for both mother and father. Also, the denominator for this measure excludes children who, during the first 6 months of the year, were discharged from foster care with a discharge reason of reunification with parents or primary caretakers, living with other relatives, or guardianship.

<sup>6</sup> A child is considered to be "legally free" for adoption if there is a date for the parental rights termination reported to AFCARS for both mother and father.

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